

Jefferson & Southwestern Exploration: the Freeman & Custis Accounts of the Red River Expedition of 1806

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Jefferson & Southwestern Exploration: The Freeman & Custis Accounts of the Red River Expedition of 1806, edited by Dan L. Flores. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984. xx, 386 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$48.50 cloth.

In the spring of 1806 the Freeman-Custis expedition sailed from Fort Adams, near Natchez, Mississippi, with instructions to ascend the Red River to its headwaters. It was one of several ventures launched by President Thomas Jefferson to determine the nature and dimensions of the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase. More costly than the celebrated Lewis and Clark enterprise, this exploring party was led by Thomas Freeman, a civil engineer, and included Peter Custis, a young medical student serving as a naturalist. After successfully moving upriver for some 615 miles—bypassing the Great Raft and the Great Swamp—the Americans were stopped by a Spanish military force and ordered to return south. In his study, *Jefferson & Southwestern Exploration*, Dan L. Flores, a professor of environmental history at Texas Tech University, introduces, edits, and annotates the surviving reports by Freeman and Custis on their aborted trip. Drawing on unpublished documents and correspondence in the National Archives and Bexar Archives, plus selections from published collections and scientific journals, he describes the intrigue surrounding the expedition, follows its daily progress upriver, and assesses its significance both for the historian and for students interested in early tribes and the natural ecosystem in the region. The result is a major work on the history of exploration in the Southwest.

The book is a complex package. It can be divided into three sections: a lengthy introduction (88 pages); a four-part narrative of the trip scissored from six sources, plus a catalog of natural history; and an extended epilogue (42 pages). The six sources include a pruned version of Freeman's report published in 1806; parts of Freeman's original report incorporated in the Edwin James 1821 story of the expedition; and four unpublished reports by Custis.

Flores's introduction is a gem. He not only describes the background and preparations for the trip, but speculates that the expedition might have been unknowingly involved in the Burr Conspiracy and could have precipitated a war with Spain. Documents in the Bexar Archives and elsewhere show that General James Wilkinson encouraged the operation, but at the same time warned Spanish officials that it planned to enter their territory (possibly move overland to Santa Fe!). If the probe produced hostilities, Wilkinson and his cohorts would seize the opportunity to carve out an empire in Texas and adjacent regions. As strained relations followed the confrontation at Spanish Fort on the Red River, Jefferson moved quickly

to divert public attention from the episode. Flores questions this "cover up," then wonders whether Jefferson had an interest in acquiring Texas at this early date.

Flores constructs a narrative of the expedition by grouping excerpts from the Freeman and Custis accounts to fit four chronological periods. Each excerpt is titled by its source—Freeman 1, Custis 4 etc.—which fractures the narration. Flores's excellent annotations provide both information and dimension for the bland reports. His interpretation and corrections of Custis's report on the natural history of the lower Red are equally valuable. The epilogue describes the reaction to the expedition and fate of the explorers, and evaluates the impact of the undertaking. Although the editor promises the book will provide intimate insights on the ecosystem along Red River, his provocative discussion of diplomatic intrigue clearly overshadows the story.

Flores has rescued the Freeman-Custis expedition from historical limbo and placed it on the roster of significant events in southwestern history. As he has hiked along much of the river, he conveys a feel for the landscape and its changing moods, for the flora and fauna on its banks, and for the early people who called it home. The volume is enhanced by fifty illustrations (Flores took some twenty photos himself) and seven documentary maps. A modern map indicating the route of the expedition and major sites mentioned would have been helpful. Filling out the volume are three appendixes, a bibliography, and an index. This is a landmark study that opens new doors to the study of the southwestern border.

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HARWOOD P. HINTON

Wolves for the Blue Soldiers: Indian Scouts and Auxiliaries with the United States Army, 1860-1890, by Thomas W. Dunlay. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982. ix, 304 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliographic essay, index. \$21.95 cloth.

Thomas W. Dunlay took the title for his first book from the words of the Crow healer Pretty Shield, who in reference to several of her fellow tribesmen called them "these Crows, who were going to be Wolves for the blue soldiers." *Wolves for the Blue Soldiers* may be the most poetic yet accurately descriptive title composed for a book in American Indian studies in years, but the quality of Dunlay's work exceeds even the promise of his title. Dunlay, who earned his Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska and who assisted in the preparation of the new edition of the Lewis and Clark journals at that same

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